"Lie Lie Land": Re-examining American Drama in the Era of Post-Truth Politics

A Case Study on *The Night Of*

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Introduction

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This is America: Post-truth Politics and the Search for Truth

Entering the 2016 presidential election, a number of dystopian novels were the bestselling books for that year. From Orwell's *1984* to Sinclair Lewis' *It Can't Happen Here*, these apocalyptic fictions dominated the sales in a year reminiscent of Lewis' protagonist, Senator 'Buzz', who declared himself to be the candidate of the 'Forgotten Men' (16; Gage). The allure of these fictions can be summed up in what Yale Professor, Beverly Gage, notes as their anecdote of "a blustery populist candidate rising, against all odds, to the presidency of the United States" (Gage). Indeed the 2016 presidential election set the stage for a public and academic debate concerning a so-called 'Trump-effect' (McComiskey 33). As renowned Henry Giroux argues in his recent book on 'American authoritarianism', the 'Trump effect' can be described primarily as a political climate in which "the politics of performance shamelessly indulges in a culture in which the truth is sacrificed to shouting, dirty tricks, and spin doctors" (*The Public* 31). What emerges from this public and academic debate is the recently popular concept of post-truth. It is beyond doubt that the relationship between truth and politics has been an eminent point of academic and public interest throughout the history of world politics and international relations always re-emerging in times of democratic anxieties and "regression" (Geiselberger 11). It is for this reason that Arjun Appadurai points out to a particular sense of 'democratic fatigue' and a "global swing to the right" that has seen a strong rise in contemporary world politics marked by a populist focus on 'cultural chauvinism', nationalism, and an overall exhaustion with democracy's "social justice, egalitarianism, political tolerance" and "cultural diversity" ("Democracy" 16-17; "The Global"; Giroux, *American* 33). As such, post-truth constitutes a pivotal part of this contemporary democratic fatigue. Despite it being a contested term and sometimes presented as a 'new' phenomenon of the Trump era, the term post-truth is nothing more than a longstanding concern with the importance of truth in politics and the way in which truth is "being challenged as a mechanism for asserting political dominance" and thus appealing to a specific public frustrated with democracy (*American* 34; McIntyre xiv).

      Concerns about truth and politics can be found ever since Richard Hofstadter wrote about *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*, and Hannah Arendt's work on totalitarianism

(3; *The Origins* 474). But the current American political climate has seen an intensification of an overall indifference to truth fueling an ineffable discourse based on misogyny, bigotry against minorities, flagrant racism, and even more detrimental economic policies contributing to an already existing growing income inequality (Giroux, *American* 1; Yates 9). In his study of bullshit, Harry Frankfurt identified this indifference to truth to be the epitome of what is now coined as post-truth. Not only is the current American political discourse under the 'Trump effect' exhibiting a dedication to presenting falsehoods, but there is a general indifference towards the "authority of truth" with the guiding adage being "what appears is good; what is good appears" (36; Debord 9-10; McComiskey 12). Phony statements, false accusations, and absurd promises fitted to each situation are accompanied with explicit Islamophobic, xenophobic, and racist narratives that do not only confine themselves to being individual sentiments but have become policy-driving forces (Beydoun 13). Referring to African countries, Haiti, and El Salvador as 'shitholes', defending Charlottesville Nazi rally, insisting that Muslim communities in New Jersey were happy to see the World Trade Centre being attacked on 9/11, retweeting British Islamophobic far-right propaganda videos, arguing that 25 percent of Muslim Americans find terrorist jihad acts to be legitimate, and many more instances are among the paragons of America's post-truth politics (Gray; Patel and Levinson-Waldman 1; Baker and Sullivan; Johnson and Hauslohner; Carroll and Jacobson). The abovementioned examples are not merely non-factual absurd comments causing public flabbergast but have become real-time policies, namely, the Muslim Ban, a 'zero tolerance' immigration policy, and the attempts to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, which affect thousands of lives both domestically and externally as they receive the blame for what Trump called the "American Carnage" (Krugman; Haberman et al.).

In this global frustration with democracy, rising populism and nationalism, America is witnessing a post-truth political era that depends on Frankfurt's 'bullshit' as a rationale for supposedly 'Making America Great Again' and putting 'America First'. Among the facts that are beclouded by the recent 'Trump-effect' and intensified post-truth is that entire Muslim communities continue to be under severe surveillance (Love 11; Aziz). Moreover, according to the Pew Research Center and the FBI, in the past two years, "the number of assaults against Muslims in the United States rose significantly between 2015 and 2016, easily surpassing the modern peak reached in 2001, the year of the September 11 terrorist attacks" (Kishi). While the

Trump administration continues to focus on supposedly growing crime linked to immigrants, research has shown that there is a negative correlation between crime and immigration, while on the contrary crime rates have been significantly lower since the 1990's (Krugman; Gramlich; Bernat 1, 20). The fact is that "there is no immigration crisis; there is no crisis of immigrant crime […] the real crisis is an upsurge in hatred — unreasoning hatred that bears no relationship to anything the victims have done" (Krugman). Therefore, rather than being simply a presentation of lies and falsehoods or solely the mere appeal to emotions and nationalist sentiments, post-truth is a complex political climate with social and cultural implications (Prado 6). Hence, in order to come to a definition of post-truth then, despite the proliferation of definitions that tend to put emphasis on either objective truth or appeals to emotions, following Prado's definition, post-truth as a concern regarding truth in politics can be seen as an encompassing term referring to the prioritization of "personal beliefs and feelings, spurn consistency", overall indifference towards objective facts, "and disdain factual rebuttals and demands for substantiation" (7).

  While discussions have unfolded considering post-truth and the postmodern condition referring to the subjectivity of truth and that postmodern relativity supports right-wing ideology (Prado 9; McIntyre 126), what is important to acknowledge is the postmodern condition to be a zeitgeist of intensified alienation, illusions, dystopia, chaos, and political disillusionment (Best and Kellner, *The Postmodern* 25, 30; Ebert 130). Post-truth contributes to this postmodern anxiety and is dependent on irrational fears and imaginary threats, however, it cannot be seen as a direct consequence of postmodernity. As Best and Kellner argue, to consider post-truth as a new postmodern phenomenon implies an extreme "rupture" with past that does not do justice to the "sense of enduring continuities with the past and to the fact that many ideas and phenomena that are claimed to be postmodern have their origins or analogues precisely in the modern era" (*The Postmodern* 31). As such many allegedly 'postmodern' phenomena are not 'new' but are intensified modern factors set in a postmodern context of new technologies, global capitalism, terrorism, surveillance, militarism, and "growing social polarization", all of which give rise to intensified fears and anxieties used by recent post-truth discourse (Boggs and Pollard xiv; *The Postmodern* 31; Ebert 130). For this reason, this study interprets post-truth as a continuous modern political indifference to truth intensified in a postmodern context and describes "postmodern phenomena more modestly […] while appreciating the novel qualities

of the contemporary era" (25); that is to say, "the postmodern is a radicalization of the modern" (*The Postmodern* 26). Consequently, this study moves beyond a so-called 'ludic postmodernism' and its champions who put emphasis on relativism, subjectivism, and an "anything goes" approach in politics (*The Postmodern* 184). This approach also champions art's superficial role of being supportive or indifferent to the state of affairs, concerned only with its aesthetics and disavows "the modernist project of critique and opposition" (Ebert 129-130; *The Postmodern* 137). Central to this study is the 'postmodernism of resistance' or 'oppositional postmodernism' which while being aware of its postmodern condition seeks as a continuation of modernity to provide "new forms of resistance" and carries a particular responsibility towards critique, opposition, and alternative meanings (*The Postmodern* 27; Ebert 133-134).

As such this study delves into this nexus between art, film, and television or what can be generally referred to as a contemporary visual culture and a larger complex political climate of post-truth and growing anxieties and fears in the context of postmodernity. While using the American political climate as the main case study, central to this endeavor is, therefore, the following question: How does contemporary American visual culture comment on- and provide complex, critical, and subverting meanings of a contemporary post-truth American socio-political sphere in a way that alludes 'oppositional postmodernism'? Ultimately, this question is within the realm of a critical visual methodology that is concerned with "the social effects of the visual material" under examination (Rose 46). Following Rose's distinction of sites of the visual being: production, the image itself, circulation of the image, and audiencing, as well as the three modalities to each of these sites being: compositional, technological, and social, what Rose defines as "Discourse Analysis I" will be used given its focus on the site of the image itself and its social modality (50). As Rose argues, this discourse analysis explores the visual constructs "accounts of the social world" as well as the socio-political production of the image and the questions of power and resistance that come along with it (192-193). Thus, discourse is understood as a "particular knowledge about the world which shapes how the world is understood and how things are done in it" (Rose 187; Barker and Jane 102). This discourse analysis is therefore not only concerned with how the visual interprets a socio-political discourse of post-truth politics that is to say the discursive production an "authoritative account" of post-truth but also with how this account is challenged and new discourses are produced through the visual (Rose 194). Given the scope of this study, the question at hand will draw on Richard

Price's and Steven Zaillian's *The Night Of* as the principal chosen visual case study. Since its premiere on HBO in 2016, the series has received critical acclaim and multiple award nominations including the Primetime Emmy Awards and the Golden Globe Awards. This resulted in a historical win of the show's protagonist Riz Ahmed to be the first Muslim and Asian to win in the "Outstanding Lead Actor in a Limited Series or Movie" category (Ali; *Television Academy*; *Golden Globes*). In its complex juxtaposition of issues of justice, racism, identity, diaspora, politics, and truth, the series comes in a political climate in which all of the above dominate the political scene (*American* 23-24).

The aim of this study is to project a hopeful and critical role to visual culture in relation to world politics which has been extensively overshadowed by an academic emphasis on 'ludic' visual culture (Melley 222; Alsultany 13-14; Semmerling 254; Bloodsworth-Lugo and Lugo-Lugo 15, 176). It is indeed true that, as McComiskey argues, there has been an extensive shift in the public perception of post-truth discourse as being a common practice or a political routine (12; Prado 8), nevertheless this study disagrees with the pessimistic contention that this shift entails that the audiences have themselves also lost "concern for facts, realities, or truths, thus relieving speakers from the need to conceal their manipulative intent" and that "post-truth audiences accept bullshit as the norm in public discourse without objection" (12). In these political times of post-truth and what Evans and Giroux refer to as the loss of "democratic vitality" and in which audiences, artists, and journalists are asked to abandon critical thinking and are shunned as being 'Fake News', image-making still holds a potential for creative opposition even if it does not necessarily provide concrete guidelines for political oppositional action (Evans and Giroux 79; Hutcheon 3). The aim is to bring to light this resistance and "de-naturalizing critique" of post-truth discourses and to put the emphasis back onto the importance of "postmodern cultural politics" (Best and Kellner, *The Postmodern* 276). Ultimately, this study can be seen as an attempt to stress the importance of culture as an equally important mechanism alongside classic "political education, rational persuasion, and moral appeals" and its role in challenging "the dominant mode of experiencing reality" (*The Postmodern* 277). In order to come to an answer to the posed question, the first chapter provides a theoretical and methodological framework, the second chapter analyzes how the series interprets the postmodern post-truth political climate, and the final chapter examines how the series ultimately confronts a post-truth discourse.

Chapter

I

Film and Post-Truth Politics: A Theoretical and Methodological Framework

1.1: An American Zeitgeist: Post-truth, Populism, and Postmodern Uncertainty

In his renowned novel *1948*, George Orwell envisioned a society characterized by the "age of doublethink" in which facts and logic are overshadowed by lies and deception (*1984*). Despite the recent popularity of the term post-truth in the public and academic debate, concerns surrounding a political and cultural climate of 'alternative facts' have been expressed by scholars and thinkers and most importantly as early as in Orwell's dystopian fantasy (Mussell 141). Orwell's 'doublethink' describes a conjunction between an exaggeration of a nationalist sentiment and an erosion of truth which emanates from what Orwell identifies as the "indifference to reality" ("Notes"). This indifference goes hand in hand with the nationalist's ultimate aspiration to "to secure more power and more prestige" for his nation and himself as it allows for 'picking facts' ("Notes"). On a similar note, historian Richard Hofstadter examined what he famously described as the "paranoid" political style in which the neglection of facts and imagination are predominant (37). According to Hofstadter this abandonment of facts arises from a nationalistic paranoia of "heated exaggeration, suspiciousness, and conspiratorial fantasy" (3). The nationalistic paranoia of a political group adopting this style is explained by their claim that "America has been largely taken away from them and their kind" or the people they aim to represent (23). Most importantly they argue for their determination to restore what they see as the ideal American society and its values which, as they imagine, are being threatened (23). As such, the nationalist paranoid desire to 'restore' bespeaks a nostalgia for the "good old days" or as Zygmunt Bauman a 'retrotopia'; a desire for "visions located in the lost/stolen/abandoned but undead past" with no consideration of facts or real-time developments that may contradict this nostalgic desire (*Retrotopia* 8,10; "Notes"; Hofstadter 37-38).

Despite the popularity of the term post-truth following the Trump election and the intensification of post-truth in the current rhetoric of the Trump administration, defining post-

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truth as a "temporal break" is problematic as it lacks a comprehensive understanding of the term throughout political history and the extensive scholarly and intellectual examination of this political phenomenon (Mussell 141; McComiskey 5-6; Hyvönen 121; Horsthemke 2). Along these lines, in addition to Hofstadter and Orwell, among the early conceptions of post-truth that are closer to recent developments in the American political scene and populist discourse, have been produced by political thinkers such as Ralph Keyes and Eric Alterman (Keyes 12-13; Alterman 305-306). Both Keyes and Alterman analyzed the concept of post-truth politics in the context of a post 9/11 political sphere. According to Keyes, a post-truth era is a political atmosphere in which there is "a whole lotta lyin' goin' on" (4) which can be found in American politics throughout the "Reagan-Clinton-Bush era" (12). In a similar manner, Alterman describes post-truth politics as a phenomenon of "presidential lies" (3-4). While relying on case studies from the Franklin D. Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, and Ronald Reagan administrations, Alterman finally concludes with an examination of the George W. Bush administration which according to him "returned the presidency to the tradition of presidential deception" (4, 296). At the hand of these analyses, both Keyes and Alterman present the history of political lies as a 'cautionary tale' and emphasize the detrimental role of such lies and deception in post 9/11 American politics and the War on Terror. Above all, Keyes and Alterman concede that post-truth forms an American political atmosphere of "dishonesty" and "deception" (Keyes 5-6; Alterman 10). The essence of a post-truth political climate is the habitual fashion in which dishonesty and deception take place to the point that both have become "commonplace" and "accustomed" (Keyes 12; Alterman 3; Arendt, *The Origins* 333).

This routinized deception is what philosopher Harry Frankfurt examined in what he famously referred to as "theoretical understanding of bullshit" (2). Rather than being simple routinized dishonesty or deception, post-truth can be seen as being synonymous to Frankfurt's analysis of bullshit as "a lack of connection to truth" and an "indifference to how things really are" (33-34). According to Frankfurt bullshit is located outside the conventional dichotomy of truth and lies, he argues that both the liar and the truth speaker are "in the same game", as "each responds to the facts as he understands them, although the response of the one is guided by the authority of the truth, while the response of the other defies that authority and refuses to meet its demands" (59). However, "the bullshitter ignores these demands altogether. He does not reject the authority of the truth, as the liar does, and oppose himself to it. He pays no attention

to it at all" (59-61). Thus, following Orwell's and Hofstadter's same line of argument, post-truth ought not to be defined as simply a political climate of lies, but rather as a political climate in which there is incessantly no consideration of truth. It is the complete indifference to truth and facts that characterizes post-truth. As Frankfurt argues, the liar and bullshitter both present their arguments as being true and aim to deceive their listeners to that extent, the liar, however, aims to camouflage the fallacy of his statements while the bullshitter aims to hide the indifference to the "truth values" of what he is saying (54-55). Hence, the deception of the bullshitter is that he misleads his audience from understanding that his statements are guided by an apathy towards the truthfulness of his speech (55). More recently, Yale historian, Timothy Snyder, also emphasized this apathy towards truth symptomatic of post-truth, as he considers it to be the "scorn of everyday facts" and the "construction of alternative realities" (*On Tyranny* 70).

Along these lines, the focal point of consensus that can be deduced from early and recent examinations of post-truth is that, firstly, a post-truth political climate does not simply entail an intensification of lies but an overall indifference to truth values. Therefore, rather than considering the *post-* prefix to indicate a "temporal break, after which the political realm has been denuded of facts and truth" (Mussell 141), *post* implies a break with the consideration of truth values (Horsthemke 273; McComiskey 6). Following Hannah Arendt's observation, what post-truth implies is that "the difference between truth and falsehood may cease to be objective and become a mere matter of power and cleverness, of pressure and infinite repetition" (*The Origins* 333). The essence of post-truth is, therefore, as Arendt argues, is not simply "that the lies will now be accepted as truth, and the truth be defamed as lies, but that the sense by which we take our bearings in the real world – and the category of truth vs. falsehood is among the mental means to this end – is being destroyed" ("Truth" 253). The second point, which follows as an aftermath of the former, is that post-truth constitutes a bigger peril to truth and facts than lies considering that lies take the truth into account and aim to hide it, while post-truth is unconcerned with truth values altogether. It is for this reason that Frankfurt concludes that "bullshit is a greater enemy of the truth than lies are" (61). Similarly, Snyder asserts that "post-truth is pre-fascism" relying primarily on examples from twentieth-century Europe and emphasizing that post-truth sets the stage for fascism as it precludes political criticism and opposition (*On Tyranny* 65; Arendt, *The Origins* 333). According to Snyder, the abandonment of facts and truth form the basis on which one can criticize power, however, "because there is

no basis upon which to do so" (65). Thus, building on Arendt's analyses of fascism and the intersection of truth and politics, Snyder as well as Horsthemke highlight the need for truth values in politics given the importance of provable facts in democratic processes and debates (275). An indifference to reality and facts results in a political climate of "spectacle" and political statements and debates enter the realm of performance (Giroux, *The Public* 31), in which facts are contextual and politics depends on the splendor and nationalistic sentiments (Snyder, *On Tyranny* 65; Arendt, *The Origins* 333; Arendt, "Truth" 253-255; Horsthemke 275). Nationalistic sentiments and exaggerations that are unconcerned with facts and evidence play therefore a pivotal role in post-truth politics. As Snyder argues, nationalism and post-truth go hand in hand considering the nationalist's tendency to imagine his nation beyond the paradigm of international realities and standards and an indisposition to appreciate and evaluate his nation within this framework (*On Tyranny* 114).

In this regard, the nostalgic aspect of post-truth politics, as understood throughout the analysis above, and its nationalistic exaggerations have been examined within the longstanding debates on populism and the recent rise of populist movements. While there have been a plethora of academic studies on populist philosophy, there is a general confusion and unclarity among scholars, especially when it comes to the definition of populist discourse (Müller 7-9; Worsley 245-248; Gellner and Ionescu 1; Mudde and Kalwasser 3). Considering that some scholars define populism as an ideology (Mudde & Kaltwasser 5), while others define it as mainly a discursive strategy (Laclau, *On Populist* 13; Hofstadter 37), viewing populism as an ideology is problematic as it presents normative issues (Aslanidis 79-80). As Aslanidis argues, assuming populism to be an ideology brings with it an essentialist position and thus "a political party or leader can or cannot be populist; there is no grey zone" (78). Consequently, there is no room for what Aslanidis describes as "degreeism", that is to say, "the essentialist ideological perspective […] refrains from any quantification of the phenomenon that would expose intragroup variation" or "subtypes" (78). Hence, most importantly populism is dependent on the style, purpose, and the setting it occupies which makes it a contested concept (Worsley 247; Laclau, *On Populist* 13-14). According to Wolsey, populism is "neither democratic nor anti-democratic" but rather a feature of a complex interplay between political cultures and structures (247). What matters therefore is considering populism to be a discursive strategy since, as Laclau argues, "a movement is not populist because in its politics or ideology it presents actual contents

identifiable as populistic, but because it shows a particular logic of articulation of those contents – whatever those contents are" ("Populism" 33; Aslanidis 82,84). Thus, rather than generally deeming populist discourse as either necessary for democracy and a catalyst for the political left (Laclau, *On Populist* 154), or as being a threat to democracy (Müller 6), an analysis is needed that looks particularly at a discourse of populism in relation to post-truth constituting an essential part of right-wing populist logic under investigation in the current context of the American political climate. Any analysis and conclusions of populist discourse are therefore contingent on post-truth and dependent on the context of American politics.

This context-based approach to populism does not take away the fact that there are several common characteristics to populist discourse that are crucial when examining contemporary conceptions of post-truth. According to Arter, there is an overall consensus that "populism is confrontational, chameleonic, culture-bound and context-dependent, varying from polity to polity and taking on the hue of the environment in which it occurs" (490-491). Alongside this context-dependency of populist discourse relevant to post-truth is its confrontational nature. Following the emergence of populist movements in twentieth-century America led by Senator Joseph McCarthy and Alabama Governor George Wallace − which is the style Hofstadter had in mind when describing the "paranoid style" of politics− parallels between current populist narratives and these movements lie in "the eternal attempt of people to claim politics as something of theirs" (26; Worlsey 248). Central to this claim is an "anti-elitist" and "anti-pluralist" discourse; as Müller argues "populists claim that they, and they alone, represent the people" (3). Thus, there is a constant confrontation at the heart of populist discourse against the so-called 'establishment' and the supposed threats towards the 'people'. According to Muller, populist discourse can therefore be seen as a "moralistic imagination of politics", that is to say, "populism requires a *pars pro toto* argument and a claim to exclusive representation" of the people (20). Such representation is only theoretical as populist discourse practically represents only a specific segment of the population which constitute an "idealization of the people" or the "morally pure people" (Müller 22, 3; Lowndes 242-243). Similar to Nixon's claim of representing the 'silent majority' (Lowndes 243), populist discourse imagines this majority to be a "fictional entity outside existing democratic procedures, a homogeneous and morally unified body whose alleged will can be played off against actual election results in democracies" (Müller 27). In this regard, populist discourse persists on the existence of a threat

against the imagined majority it claims to represent regardless of evidence or real-time events. The fantasy within such discourse assumes a constant threat that is not an "objective" status quo but an interpreted belief which fits into the nationalistic right-wing populist discourse and its neoliberal policies and hostility against minorities and immigrants (Müller 42-43). Most importantly, when there is an opposition or an emphasis on 'commonplace' events or when the facts suggest an alternative will of the people, right-wing populist discourse scorns such results as being part of either conspiracies or frauds and clings to its sole representation of the American people and the morality of its policies (Müller 39; Giroux, *The Public* 30; Hofstadter 37-38). It is within this particular political climate that post-truth occupies a central position in right-wing populist discourse in current American politics.

A critical question constituting an analysis of such an atmosphere of post-truth populist politics is one that considers the foregoing in the context of postmodernity. Central to this consideration is the sense of ambiguity and uncertainty constituting a fundamental aspect of post-truth politics in a postmodern context. When it comes to the larger intellectual debate on the notion of postmodernity, to settle the confusion between complex terms such as postmodernism, postmodern, and postmodernity, what is at stake here is considering postmodernity to be a process of "historical and sociological configurations" or as Barker and Jane argue, 'the era of postmodernity' (181; Hammond 5; Harvey 39; Zima 11; Best and Kellner, *The Postmodern* 23,30). What is essential here is to emphasize that postmodernity in this context is not understood as a "fundamental break with modernity", rather it is seen as a "mutation of modernity and a shift within modernity" (*The Postmodern* 25). Thus, as Best and Kellner ague, such position on postmodernity does not discard modern "concern for truth" and acknowledges a postmodern 'turn' instead of assuming a 'rupture' with modernity "which stresses extreme breaks, discontinuities, and an apocalyptic sense of ending and completely new beginnings" (*The Postmodern* 25). Ultimately this approach considers the postmodern condition to be a "radicalization of the modern" in which modern aspects such as alienation, illusions, political disillusionment, and dominance of mass media are intensified (*The Postmodern* 25, 30). Important to this postmodern historical and cultural shift is what Boggs and Pollard interpret − relying on their analysis of post 9/11 society − as a "growing mood of ambiguity, chaos, and dystopia" (216). For, Boggs and Pollard, September 11 can be seen as a turning point that "has reinforced the conditions of postmodernity" (11). This assertion regarding the significance of

9/11 when referring to postmodernity comprises a consensus point among scholars (Pollard 177-180; Hammond 2). For instance, MacDonald asserts that the 9/11 attacks intensified a so-called cultural anxiety, as such, "in postmodernity, the social is considered to be uncontainable and unknowable; the site of disorder" (43). Similarly, according to Bauman, postmodernity is a condition of uncertainty in which the future is the domain of, "manifold fears, anxieties and apprehensions" in which "we feel our control over our own lives slipping from our hands, reducing us to the status of pawns moved 'to and fro' in a chess game played by unknown players indifferent to our needs" ("Symptoms" 22-23).

Populist post-truth discourse plays into these postmodern fears by supposedly presenting the salvation from this uncertainty and threats of postmodernity ("Symptoms" 27; Bauman, *Liquid Times* 17; Müller 43; Appadurai, "Democracy" 16, 19-20). It taps into these postmodern anxieties and presents its leader as the "caretaker" who restores with his policies the will of the people and returns his nation to its glory (Müller 30, 77). Nevertheless, populist promises of restoration and the indifference to facts that accompany them, only serve as an intensification of this climate of disillusionment. As Bauman asserts there is a general fear of the "Great Unknown" used by politicians with no specific evidence or concrete facts backing these claims; postmodern fear is simply used as "political capital" (*Liquid Times* 17). A key aspect of this use of fear can be found in the broader experience of postmodern politics. According to Freie, central to postmodern politics is that "assertions of truth are contingent on context" (323). Thus, populist post-truth politics as a form of postmodern politics resorts to the appeal to emotions with no consideration of facts and logic; in other words, "postmodern politics is manipulative, not dialogical […] emotions tend to override logic" (Freie 324). Problems and solutions are not established on the grounds of facts and realities but rather on illusions, "mistrust", and "suspiciousness" (Bauman, "Symptoms" 27). Consequently, rather than alleviating uncertainty and ambiguity, populist post-truth discourse contributes to this postmodern condition. A definition and an analysis of the currently increasingly popular term of post-truth can only come to terms when it is contextualized and understood, firstly, as a break with the consideration of truth in politics, and secondly, it must be understood within a context of right-wing American populist discourse and nationalistic sentiments. Lastly, post-truth populism ought to be contextualized in the overall complex framework of postmodernity as a condition of uncertainty,

ambiguity, and anxiety. It is only through such contextual comprehension of post-truth politics that one can aim to examine its cultural implications at the heart of this study.

1.2: Culture and Politics: Film Analysis in Light of Post-Truth Politics

The importance of arts and drama and its intersection with politics has been a matter of contention as early as in Plato's and Aristotle's inquiries when it comes to ancient poetry and fiction. While Plato insisted on the delinquent role of arts in a democratic state as a deceptive representation of reality or *mimesis* (*μίμησις*) (Rep. 595b,598b-e), Aristotle provides a different view of *mimesis,* which leans towards a constructive contribution of drama in a democratic society (Poet. 1448b 4-25, 1451b 1-30, 1453b 1-15). Thus, what is at stake here is considering cultural stories that take the form of either a motion picture, a television series, or a play, to be "political" (Weber 228). As Weber concludes: "All cultural sites are powerful arenas in which political struggles take place. And, maybe what is most important, is that this way of rethinking IR theory has helped us to rethink the relationship between culture and politics. Culture is not opposed to politics. Culture is political, and politics is cultural" (228). Therefore, understanding the function of culture within world politics and recent political developments and debates surrounding populism and post-truth requires a contextual approach to film that examines drama in the context of politics. In other words, film is analyzed not as "an aesthetic practice" but rather as a "social practice" bound to a complex political context of post-truth (Turner 205-206). One can understand this role of film as a cultural artifact through the relational question that lies at the heart of any analysis of dramatic works (Monaco 391). In a contextual approach to film, this relational question is concerned with the relation between the dramatic work and a larger socio-political context in which the visual work is regarded as "evidence of social, cultural, and political currents" (Monaco 422). Hence, the aim of this relational question is to explore the nexus between film and post-truth politics, that is to say, "how we use films" and how films function in an American political climate of post-truth (Monaco 391; Barker and Jane 55).

As multiple scholars have studied drama and story-making in relation to postmodernity and postmodern politics, many analyses fail to acknowledge and engage with any critical or alternative function of popular culture and cinema. Predominantly, there is a general premise that films have played an important role when it comes to contributing to- and echoing stereotypes, racial slurs, cultural hegemony, and nationalist principles of American

exceptionalism (Squires 200; Nilsen and Turner 4; Giglio 260; Pinder 96; Bloodsworth-Lugo and Lugo-Lugo 176). As such the abovementioned analyses are engaged with a dramatic contribution to the "discourse production" of an "authoritative account" (Rose 194). Among the most common focus points of studies dealing with culture, politics and film analysis, have been post 9/11 representations of Arab Muslim characters. For instance, Jack Shaheen famously argued in 2008 that "Arabs remain the most maligned group in the history of Hollywood" (1), while other scholars have emphasized the 'US vs. the Other' discourse in dramatic works (Semmerling 254). Moreover, other recent studies argue for the existence of a continuing defaming representation of Arab and Muslim characters that presents "a new kind of racism, one that projects antiracism and multiculturalism on the surface but simultaneously produces the logic and affects necessary to legitimize racist policies and practices" (Alsultany 16). On a different note, scholars have highlighted the role of film in post-racial and colorblind discourse, which has contributed to ignoring racial issues and presenting racial struggle as something of the past. According to Squires, film has contributed to the reproduction of a collective memory of "white heroism and innocence" central to post-racial discourse (200). Similarly, Giglio claims that despite progress in terms of dramatic representations of minorities, many films continue to project a "feeling good racism, that is, the kind of racism that […] does little to resolve racial conflicts or alter racial behavior yet allows white audiences to leave the theater feeling good about themselves" (260). Therefore, these conclusions generally resonate with what Timothy Melley referred to as the "covert sphere", in which popular culture and drama "articulate a rationale for the covert sector" (222). According to Melley, in a post 9/11 socio-political context, drama and popular culture occupies an indispensable part of a large discourse by the 'covert state', that is to say, a discourse of national security, covert operations, and a "suspension of democracy as a means of saving democracy" (5).

There is no doubt that the abovementioned conclusions are significant and have yielded crucial insights within the field of visual analysis and the study of culture and politics. Yet, there remains a considerable limited attention given to a more "rebellious spirit" of drama especially in light of recent political intricacies (Boggs and Pollard ix). Through their extensive study of post 9/11 postmodern popular culture and fiction, Boggs and Pollard aim to highlight this very omitted aspect of film and they shed light on drama's evolving movement towards "diversity, critique, marginality, and even rebelliousness" and (viii). Similarly, Kellner illustrates through

his study of post 9/11 Hollywood, how − in a highly controversial post-9/11 political climate of the so-called 'War on Terror'− "documentary and fiction films put on display the problems with the corporate economy, corruption and stupidity, and the misdeeds and utter incompetence of the Bush-Cheney regime" (258). This is not to say that drama provides political solutions or guidelines, but most importantly drama has the ability to present and highlight a disillusionment with political currents. What many studies thus omit is a consideration of dramatic works as a "contested terrain" with a complex and diverse interpretation of politics "that reproduces existing social struggles" (Kellner 33). While some films certainly transcode covert-sphere themes, other films 'go against the grain' by providing complex, alternative and oppositional narratives of politics (Kellner 34). An analysis of this function of film therefore requires, as mentioned above, a contextual approach to film that is, firstly, concerned with the social modality (i.e. the political and cultural context) of the visual. Secondly, an approach that is concerned with "how images construct accounts of the social world", in other words, the construction of- and meanings embedded in the image (Rose 192). Along these lines, beyond the emphasis on discursive authoritative accounts by previous studies, this approach embraces a discourse analysis that is concerned with how such accounts are "contested" (Rose 194).

Chapter

II

"I Don't Want to Be Stuck with the Truth": An Inquiry of Post-Truth Interpretation in *The Night Of*

In his renowned works, Raymond Williams introduces the concept of a 'structure of feeling' indicating a particular social *zeitgeist*. Rather than simply referring to the specific dominant culture and experiences of an era, Williams' concept signifies the complex and dynamic process within the structure of feeling leading to the emergence of new forms of feelings and experiences (65). Therefore, when thinking about postmodernity and its structure of feeling of uncertainty and ambiguity, there is indeed a dynamic process of ever-changing novelties within postmodern culture mandated by various cultural practices being either film, art, literature etc. (Best and Kellner, *The Postmodern* 108). As Williams argues, a structure of feeling and the processes of its internal transformation can, therefore, be found primarily in the 'recorded culture' of the period (66-67). Pivotal to analyzing a structure of feeling is to acknowledge that it primarily refers to the most "dominant" culture and does not constitute a "uniform" culture within a given society (80). Cultural practices do not solely function in accordance with what Williams coins as the "popular structure of feeling", but cultural practices through creative narratives break with the dominant structure of feeling in order to create and initiate new feelings and experiences (86). It is beyond doubt the art represents the structure of feeling in which they operate, however, there is an ongoing interaction between the dominant culture and the artwork. It is through this interaction that art's interpretation of its surroundings produces novel feelings and responses constituting the transformations within a structure of feeling (86). The following chapters explore how *The Night of* embodies this interaction between fiction and an American structure of feeling of populist post-truth in the context of postmodernity. The following chapter first analyzes how *The Night Of* interprets this postmodern post-truth ambiance.

2.1: Postmodern Spectacle and the Post-Truth Sphere: Reading Baudrillard and Debord

"In a world that is really upside down, the true is a moment of the false" (Debord 9).

When it comes to setting the series in its political context, through the series' narrative and *dramatis personae*, *The Night of'* represents a postmodern sphere of uncertainty in which truth values are completely meaningless. The series narrates the night in which Naz Khan, a native New Yorker of Pakistani origin, is arrested for the murder of a young girl he accidentally met while driving his father's taxi cab. After spending the night at her apartment, Naz wakes up to find that Andrea has been stabbed to death and rushes outside in panic. Following his arrest, Naz is placed in Rikers Island to await his trial and finds himself forced to adapt to the harsh prison culture and is in a constant confrontation with the outside world consisting of his attorneys and parents. As the story progresses Naz's character develops to a disillusioned drug addict unable to cope with his new life outside prison as an ex-convict despite the jury's decision that Naz cannot be found guilty of murder (Price and Zaillian). Therefore, the series sets a naïve confused student character in a bleak noir narrative who eventually develops into an even more disillusioned persona towards the end of the series. The prevalent noir lighting, filming techniques, and color scheme are among the elements that emphasize the series' gloomy atmosphere. While these elements are characteristic to neo-noir style, central to the series discourse are also typical classic noir themes of disorientation, ambiguity, and suspicion (Conrad 2). The series' adoption of neo-noir elements is essential as it brings to light the postmodern sphere eminent in the series' discourse. It is evident that neo-noir has been studied extensively in connection with postmodernity primarily through its ability to represent and dramatize postmodern "bitterly harsh narratives about the human condition" (Boggs and Pollard 67). Specifically, in a post 9/11 American context, neo-noir elements in film have emphasized and interpreted anxieties within the postmodern condition through their representation of characters faced with a world beyond their control, dominated by illusions, in which characters are "defeated and powerless" (Boggs and Pollard 12; 71).

What noir narratives, therefore, represent, as in the dreary world of Naz Khan, is reminiscent of Redhead's concept of 'claustropolitanism' (114). Inspired by Virilio and Lotringer's idea of 'foreclosure', claustropolitanism implies that a postmodern structure of feeling of informational chaos and uncertainty creates a claustrophobic willingness to "leave the planet" (75,183; Redhead 115). In the world of *The Night Of* this claustrophobic atmosphere is not only visible in the literal imprisonment of Naz but is also emphasized through the series' contention that the outside world is also deprived of a sense of liberation. Throughout the series

the outside world is a world of illusions and chaos; if Rikers Island is unbearable due its harsh conditions and because it forces its subjects to try and 'fit in', what makes the outside world unbearable is the same fakery and illusions that dominate it. In his renowned works on media and postmodern culture, Jean Baudrillard argues that postmodern culture can only be defined in terms of this dominance of illusions or what he refers to as simulacra. For Baudrillard postmodern culture marks the end of the 'real' and instead the utter domination of simulations, that is to say, self-referential signs that have "no relation to the objective world" (6; Best and Kellner, *The Postmodern* 99). In other words, there is a dominance of 'sign values', by which Baudrillard refers to the social prestige of a sign instead of its objective reality (6). Due to this process of simulation through mass communications and technology, objective reality is substituted with abstract imaginary signs that instead of referring to an object in the world have become completely self-referential (*The Postmodern* 101-102). According to Baudrillard, simulation, therefore, annihilates the mere distinction between the 'real' and the 'virtual' and creates a postmodern condition in which images and simulacra are more real than objective reality, that is to say, they establish a condition of 'hyperreality' (2). It is this point that constitutes the end of reality for Baudrillard and the emergence of "artificially (re)-produced" multiple abstract realities (3; *The Postmodern* 102). Therefore, there is ultimately no *de facto* basis or truth to be judged and measured against, on the contrary, all things can be seen as true and real (11, *The Postmodern* 99). *The Night Of* 's narrative embodies this ambivalence between the real and the virtual and most importantly the absence of truth values.

Alongside Baudrillard's contentions relevant to the postmodern post-truth sphere reflected through the series and Naz's progress as a character, what is important to take into consideration is the modernist notion of the spectacle. Guy Debord's concept of the 'society of spectacle'− from which Baudrillard has drawn and developed his notion of the simulacra − provides quintessential insights when it comes to the series' representation of post-truth and the role of the spectacle in current populist post-truth politics. Similar to Baudrillard, for Debord, the spectacle is a complex apparatus in which society is dominated by images and "the spectacle presents itself as a vast inaccessible reality that can never be questioned" (9-10). According to Evans and Giroux, the contemporary spectacle "has been reforged in the crucible of mass consumption and the mass media, producing new modes for power to advantage itself through the domination of everyday life" (24). Either through media, popular culture, entertainment

industries, or advertising, the spectacle through its "invasion of reality" creates a "separate pseudo-world" (7-8). The spectacle does not only operate in the realm of the entertainment industry but is an omnipresent reality that presents itself in all aspects of social life including politics. Therefore, it sets the stage for postmodern politics as it helps to 'dramatize' political narratives and personas in a sense that politics has become driven by almost Hollywood-like campaigns of "magical promises" with no real connection to evidence from the real world (*The Postmodern* 87; Snyder, *On Tyranny* 67). As Debord anticipated, in contemporary American post 9/11 political climate the spectacle has saturated political life and has given rise to what Evans and Giroux define as the "spectacularization of anxiety and fear" similar to what Glassner famously defined as a continuous "culture of fear" (Evans and Giroux 30; Glassner iv). As Debrix argues, in this postmodern political climate there is "a generalized, illogical, and often unspecified, sense of panic" which is "not capable of yielding logical, reasonable outcomes" (152). As such this prominence of the 'spectacle of fear' is an integral part of post-truth populist politics as it provides the rationale and tool for false statements, indifference to truth values, and the promotion of "fear-driven legislation" and catchy political promises (Glassner ix). In this political climate, politics becomes, as Debord argues, "upside down" in which the false presents itself as real and true (9).

2.2: Depicting a Spectacle of Post-Truth in *The Night Of*

Along these lines, the notion of spectacle and the obscurity between the real and the illusion, as theorized by Baudrillard and Debord, is of major importance in order to understand the socio-political setting in which *The Night Of* situates its narrative and characters. In the postmodern spectacle of post-truth theorized above, the alienated spectator is expected to passively consume the spectacle. As Debord argues "the spectacle's social function is the concrete manufacture of alienation" (16). The spectator is faced with multiple pervasive illusions due to which he "does not feel home anywhere, because the spectacle is everywhere" (Debord 16). The illusions of an eminent fear and the political use thereof form the most ubiquitous cultural experience from which spectators come to experience their own identity and social position (Evans and Giroux 30). Therefore, specifically in a post 9/11 political scheme and the current climate of post-truth politics, the spectator is presented with illusionary fears

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and narratives with no reliance on specific evidence. Among other strategies, recent populist post-truth politics has primarily relied and continues to rely on the spectacle of Islamophobia, xenophobia, and racism (Beydoun 13; Appadurai, "Democracy" 16). The spectacle of post-truth statements against religious and ethnic minorities is presented in the form of "shamanistic incantation" and "endless repetition" of slogans, catchphrases and promises such as 'Build that wall', 'Muslim ban', or 'Islam hates us', that carry no consideration of truth or evidence (Snyder, *On Tyranny* 66, 67; Beydoun 42). Instead, they are "the *affirmation* of appearances", in other words, the spectacle of post-truth is the "authentication of the illusion" in which the illusion is affirmed to be the truth (Debord 9; *The Postmodern* 91). The alienated spectator is therefore presented with contradictory spectacles of entertainment, advertisement, luxury, and dazzling promises as well as spectacles of unsubstantiated fears and political agendas that aim to exclude minorities and the poor (*The Postmodern* 88; Glassner xi). This is what Evans and Giroux coin as the 'politics of disposability' which they define as a political mood in which "more and more communities are now considered excess, consigned to 'zones of social abandonment,' surveillance, and incarceration" (15). It is through post-truth spectacles that recent right-wing populist discourse has intensified this 'politics of disposability' and alienated spectators utterly confused by the immensely contradictory, delusional, and pervasive spectacles that define their society.

In *The Night Of*, Naz embodies this alienated spectator suffering from the absence and complete meaninglessness of truth. Naz's ethnic and religious background as the son of Muslim Pakistani immigrants is not only central to the story but constitutes the very source of alienation at the hand of post-truth spectacles of Islamophobia. Before Naz enters Rikers Island, he is presented as a naïve and confused Muslim American who experiences the 'politics of disposability' as a Queens resident and a member of the Pakistani community facing racism and Islamophobia on a daily basis (Price and Zaillian). Thus, at the heart of the series is a character who is a spectator of a post 9/11 post-truth spectacle of anti-terrorism policies, hostility towards immigrants, and Islamophobia that relies on fears and anxieties. As Beydoun argues, Naz's character represents the "existential tightrope that defines Muslim American identity today" (6). Most importantly, Naz is forced to experience a political and social mood in which his family and to a larger extent his community are increasingly considered to be an "excess" to be disposed of based on an illusionary fear that bears no attention to the facts on the ground (Evans

and Giroux 15). Naz narrates this experience in detail as he explains an accident he had when he was in school:

> I was in fifth grade when the towers came down […] I didn't understand why I was getting beat up, why my little brother was, why my dad got jumped in his cab twice. Pakistani kids, North African kids, any type of Muslim, it was a slaughterhouse. You tried to fight back, it only made it worse. I didn't have a fight with Steve Diaz, I just shoved him down those stairs (25:47-26:49) ("Samson and Delilah").

This frustration and confusion continue after Naz's arrest and time in prison as everyone associates his arrest and assumes he is guilty due to his religious background. Before Naz is transferred to Rikers Island, the prosecuting officer urges the judge to remand Naz as he "has extensive family roots in Pakistan" and considered a "serious flight risk" ("Subtle Beast"). The media are obsessed with his story and he is on the front of every newspaper (04:51) (see fig.1 in the appendix) ("A Dark Crate"). Even when his parents try to visit him in prison an officer mockingly shouts that "some Muslim freak carved up a girl in the 2-1" (14:36-15:00) ("Subtle Beast"). Therefore, *The Night Of*'s main character is the anecdote of a subject living in a spectacle of post-truth politics dominated by the imaginary fear from specific individuals and complete communities that is the main driver of policies and political agendas (Beydoun 8-9).

  The Night Of indirectly presents the intensification of this mood of post-truth through the complex idea that truth does not matter anymore, which lies at the heart of Naz' struggle. Reflecting a world of post-truth spectacles in which crisis is a "performance" and "politics is presented as continuous stage of siege" (Müller 43), in *The Night Of*, as Naz's attorney argues, "the truth can go to hell" ("Subtle Beast"). This indifference to truth that dominates the whole storyline becomes evident during the conversations Naz has with his attorney, John, as he warns him:

> John: They come up with their story we come up with ours. The jury gets to decide which one they like best.
> […] Naz: You keep saying story like I keep making it up, but I want to tell you the truth.
> John: You really, really don't. I don't want to be stuck with the truth (04:20-04:54).
> […] Naz: I said I didn't do it. I don't understand how the truth can hurt me.

> John: […] The truth can go to hell because it doesn't help you. And if you can't
> get that through your head, right now, you can forget about the rest of your life
> (27:20-28:10) ("Subtle Beast").

Despite Naz's attempts to convince everyone that he is innocent and to tell the truth of what had happened when he met Andrea, he is continuously advised by the outside world to keep the truth to himself. As the story progresses, Naz even loses grip on what the truth is and cannot remember if he did kill Andrea or not; that is, in a world in which everyone is indifferent to the truth, Naz begins to suspect himself and finds himself in a pure state of confusion and uncertainty (*The Night Of*). As such, the series presents the audience with re-occurring suspicions. A parallel can, therefore, be found between the series' narrative and Christopher Nolan's neo-noir cinema of "universal suspicion" in which everyone and everything is suspicious and there is an overall absence of truth values (McGowan 11). Just as in Nolan's films, particularly *Inception* (2010), *The Prestige* (2006), and *Memento* (2000), a sense of doubt plays a central role in the storyline (McGowan 14, 45, 158). The concept of "universal suspicion", as defined by Bauman, constitutes a societal order in which no one can be trusted to be telling the truth. According to Bauman, "trust is replaced by universal suspicion, all bonds are assumed to be untrustworthy" and "unreliable" (*Wasted* 92-93). Along these lines, the series brings to light this very suspiciousness and doubt. As the district attorney responsible for Naz's case put it, the truth in the story becomes "redacted" and "a black rectangle of nothing" (59:27-1:00:16) (see fig.2) ("The Call of the Wind"). Nor does the truth help Naz, nor does it help solve the murder case and there is a general suspicion and doubt as to what really happened. There are only speculations and the truth is 'redacted', not to be found anywhere (*The Night Of*). All there is a spectacle of post-truth, or as Keyes argues "creative manipulation and invention of facts" that "can take us beyond the realm of mere accuracy into one of narrative truth" (153).

The absence of truth and the dominance of a spectacle of post-truth in *The Night Of* is thus presented throughout the storyline as Naz, the main spectator, cannot find salvation and remains a convicted character before and after his trial. In the early stage of the storyline the spectacle convicts Naz based on his ethnic and religious background, while as the story progresses Naz himself never finds or remembers the truth, nor do his attorneys, parents, or prosecutors. Therefore, despite the fact that the jury decides not to convict him of the murder, Naz finds himself caught up in the same vicious circle of the spectacle as he has now re-entered

the outside world of the same illusions in an even more disillusioned state than before (see fig.3). He returns to his community as a drug-addict and a person who has not been convicted of murder not because the truth had been revealed but simply because the truth was absent (Price and Zaillian*).* When they declare their decision, despite the judge's objection, the jury in Naz's trial argues that they are "deadlocked" and not able to reach consensus and state that the count is six for- to six against- conviction (1:17:06- 1:18:04) ("The Call of the Wind"). This confusion and doubt of the jury epitomize the absence of truth that lies at the heart of the storyline. Naz exists Rikers Island to an even more aggravated world of 'universal suspicion' in which everyone is suspicious of him and since there is no truth, Naz is looked down upon even by his own community ("The Call of the Wind"). In other words, *The Night Of* posits an indirect interpretation of a post-truth political climate in which, as the actor John Turturro (who plays Naz's attorney, John Stone) argues, "everything is relative"; things function is "the gray zone" and cannot be distinguished to be either black or white (HBO). The spectacle defines what is to be considered true because it functions as the "looking glass" for spectators (Debord 118). As John Stone argues in his defense speech in front of the jury:

> What we don't have proof of is who committed the crime he's been charged with. The prosecution has presented what it says is proof, but at the end of the day, it's circumstance and speculation. The rush to judgment against Nasir Khan began […] the night of and ended 10 seconds later when he was tackled to the floor. The police investigated no one else. […] The night Naz was arrested, he lost a lot. (1:08:12-1:09:53) ("The Call of the Wind").

Just as in post-truth politics the spectacle presents illusions of truth with no consideration to evidence, so does the spectacle assume Naz's guilt complemented with an indifference to truth and facts concerning other murder suspects. This leads to the creation of a subject that feels, as Evans and Giroux argue, as a "wasted product of society", as in the case of Naz (269).

As seen above, *The Night of* sets a storyline congruent with a post-truth political climate of spectacles and a postmodern sphere of uncertainty. Through its use of classic noir techniques and narratives, the series discourse presents an allegory to the recently intensified spectacle of post-truth politics dominating the American political climate, as anticipated by Baudrillard and Debord. While reflecting post-truth politics, *The Night Of* sets a storyline in which the world has been turned "upside down" and the illusion has replaced objective evidence and realities on the ground (Debord 9). Throughout the series, the spectacle of an indifference to truth values

"obliterates the boundaries between true and false by repressing all directly lived truth beneath the real presence of the falsehood maintained by the organization of appearances" (Debord 118). In this regard, the spectators of *The Night Of*'s world, including Naz, find themselves in a complete absence and vagueness of truth. In parallel with a postmodern sphere of post-truth politics in which the indifference to truth creates an atmosphere of general uncertainty (Orwell, "Notes"), the absence of truth in the series leaves no basis upon which one can judge whether Naz is innocent or guilty. Instead, Naz's character occupies an ambiguous state between guilt and innocence while the spectacle, as John Stone warned him, "creates its own story", deeming Naz to be guilty and politicizes him based on his religious background ("Subtle Beast"). When Naz tells his companion in Rikers Island, Freddy, that he did not murder Andrea, Freddy tells that is simply "doesn't matter" and that "it makes no difference"; he tells him: "There's a whole separate judicial system in here, and you just been judged and juried, and it didn't come out good for you" (51:04-51:26) ("A Dark Crate"). In other words, the spectacle determines what is 'real'. As Debord notes, the spectacle follows the mantra of "what appears is good; what is good appears" and thus "the passive acceptance it demands is already effectively imposed by its monopoly of appearances, its manner of appearing without allowing any reply" (9-10). Similarly, the series emphasizes the inability of Naz to offer a 'reply' to the spectacle to tell the truth of what happened during the night he met Andrea and is advised by everyone to leave the truth behind. Therefore, at a first glance, the series seems to present a rather pessimistic and melancholic reflection on post-truth politics and postmodern societal mood. Nevertheless, the question that remains unanswered is how the series presents new ways of thinking that challenge a post-truth structure of feeling and provide a 'way out' of this vicious circle of post-truth spectacles, simulations, and claustrotopianism, which will be analyzed extensively in the next chapter.

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Chapter

III

Postmodernism of Resistance in *The Night Of*

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As demonstrated above *The Night Of* provides an interpretation of post-truth spectacles and sets a storyline that reflects on contemporary American politics by setting its characters in a narrative that indirectly highlights a post-truth structure of feeling. Hence, this primary interpretation of what Williams refers to as the "conventional structure" of feeling constitutes the first stage of interaction between the dominant structure and art in the form of visual culture (86). Alongside this first stage of interaction, the second stage refers to the way art through this interaction creates "new feelings" and highlights issues at the heart of the dominant structure (Williams 86). As analyzed above, Baudrillard's and Debord's theory of simulations and the spectacle are pivotal when examining *The Night Of*'s interpretation of a post-truth political climate in the context of populism. Yet, Baudrillard's and Debord's theories are also relevant when it comes to the second stage of interaction described by Williams. As such, this chapter is concerned with this second level in which *The Night Of* provides new ways of thinking that confront a post-truth structure of feeling. Central to this level is, therefore, the question on how the series provides a 'reply' to the spectacle of post-truth in a way that is a manifestation of cultural resistance (Debord 10; Barker and Jane 599).

3.1: Room for Resistance within the Spectacle: Postmodern Dissimulation

Through the analysis of the notions of the spectacle, simulacra, and hyperreality as theorized by Debord and Baudrillard coming from a modernist and postmodernist framework (Best and Kellner, *The Postmodern* 104), it becomes evident that all present a critical reflection on the emergence of media. Building on Debord's modernist idea of the spectacle, Baudrillard saw the postmodern as a radical shift towards an utter domination of simulacra and hyperreality that leaves no room for resistance. Along these lines, for Baudrillard, this radically new depthless postmodern culture is deprived of the potency of modern conceptions such as truth, reality, and resistance (23, Best and Kellner, "Debord"). While it is beyond doubt that Baudrillard's analysis

of postmodern culture of simulacra and sign values is visible in contemporary post-truth politics, drawing on Best and Kellner's argument, postmodern politics of post-truth is a complex combination of spectacles and simulacra ("Debord"). Hence, rather than seeing postmodern politics in the context post-truth as a wholly new condition of hyperreality, the modernist idea of the spectacle is still essential due to the role of media within the spectacle. While in a post-truth structure of feeling truth and reality seem to be lost and there is a blurring between what is real and what is imaginary in Baudrillard's terms, this postmodern condition also presents itself as an intensification of spectacles and relevance of critique against the dominant structure. What is therefore problematic if one was to consider a postmodern climate of post-truth as solely a simulation, is that there would be no room for critical reflections by visual culture on this climate as in *The Night Of* ("Debord"). While Baudrillard offers a pessimistic view of media as they play the main role in eradicating reality and truth, within the spectacle, the media is given more potential considering the possibility of media to still critically reflect on authoritative discourses (*The Postmodern* 112).

As pointed in the previous chapter, Baudrillard's argument entails the blurring of the distinction between subject and object as well as appearance and reality and as a result the loss of reality (30). As Kellner and Best argue, Baudrillard does not contend that "representation has simply become more indirect or oblique, as Debord would have it, but that in a world where the subject/object distance is erased, […] and where signs no longer refer beyond themselves to an existing, knowable world, representation has been surpassed" (Best and Kellner, "Debord"). This constitutes an essential difference between Debord and Baudrillard. For Baudrillard, there is no room for critique that highlights a particular underlying truth or reality given the absence of reality in hyperreality (108; "Debord"; Poster 122). On the other hand, Debord's spectacle does not entail a complete substitution of the real by the illusionary but merely a domination/popularity of the illusion or "the appearance" over reality (Debord 9; "Debord"). While the spectacle may succeed in subduing some of its spectators to consume it passively, there is need and room for critique within the spectacle for uncovering the real and a necessity for "critical thought to probe behind appearances" (*The Postmodern* 112). Assuming that there is an overall "destruction of meaning", as Baudrillard argues (161), is an oversimplification to the complex and ongoing second-level interaction between visual culture and the dominant structure of feeling which can initiate new meanings (*The Postmodern* 113; Williams 86).

In a postmodern ambiance of post-truth dominated by simulation and spectacles, this second-level interaction yields a critical reflection on authoritative discourses which aims to bring to light the socio-political incentives and underlying forces behind such discourses (Best and Kellner, *The Postmodern* 113). There is, therefore, a shift from simulations and spectacles to "dissimulation" which highlights the constructiveness of appearances and the alternative realities they mask (113). For this reason, Debord's argument on the spectacle is not as much a dystopian warning as it is a reminder of the critical capacity of visual culture. What enables such critical capacity is the lived difference between the experience presented by authoritative discourses and experiences on the ground. As Debord argues, "a critique that grasps the spectacle's essential character reveals it to be a visible negation of life - a negation that has taken on a visible form", that is to say, such critique reveals the spectacle to be inharmonious and indifferent to experiences and evidence on the ground (9). Thus, despite the fact that the recent intensification of the dominant structure of post-truth populism and its indifference to truth, and the fact that visual culture functions within this structure, it has the ability to shed light on "evidence of the deadlocks and unsolved problems" of that political climate (Williams 86).

It is this function of art that can be found in what Baldwin defined as the 'paradox of education'. As Baldwin notes, authoritative accounts presented by either political figures, institutions, or media, while they permeate everyday life, they also, in turn, make conflicting experiences on the ground more visible thus enabling their spectators to see this negation more clearly ("A Talk" 678). Therefore, "the paradox of education is precisely this − that as one begins to become conscious, one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated" (678). It is thus a process of using the connection with the 'conventional structure' to critically examine this very structure. Therefore, it is inaccurate to assume that there is a loss of meaning given the new meanings created in this process of dissimulation central to Debord's and Baldwin's arguments. It is worth noting that either Debord or Baldwin would have been surprised by the immensely complex, polarized, and diverse media in our era and the extent to which the spectacle has been ever-more pervasive due to these new technologies (Evans and Giroux 30-31, Poster 48). While our current media climate has contributed to this "spectacularization of anxiety and fear" or, as McComiskey argues, the post-truth "Trump Effect", there is room for the creation of new meanings even within such a climate. This is mainly due to the fact that in power relationships, as in the case of this second-level interaction

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within the structure of feeling, new meaning is generated because power is "relational" (Evans and Giroux 33). The current climate of post-truth is thus a complex postmodern amalgam of simulation and intensified spectacles rather than a 'new' condition of hyperreality in which there is an end of meaning. This consideration is essential when attempting to analyze visual culture as it does not omit the possibility of new meanings and 'dissimulation' created in the second-level interaction within the post-truth structure of feeling.

3.2: Self-reflexivity in *The Night Of's* interpretation of Post-truth politics

"Postmodern art cannot but be political" (Hutcheon 3).

Following the above-mentioned framework, *The Night Of* embodies this function of dissimulation in the second-level interaction primarily through specific "creative elements" (Williams 86). In this regard, crucial to these creative elements used in film is the intensified self-reflection and self-reference in postmodern art. By definition, self-reflexivity refers to the active awareness of the artwork of its surrounding context that produced the artwork, and the active use thereof (Flisfeder 72; Hutcheon 1). This self-consciousness may take the form of filming techniques, such as editing, that explicitly remind the viewer that this is a film, while it can also take the form of ironic and parodic narrative and story construction (*The Postmodern* 131). The self-reflexivity of art in a postmodern context is therefore manifested in its awareness of the 'constructed' representations of the spectacle (Flisfeder 73; Hutcheon 3). As such, film uses the context to which it is bound to question that very context, that is to say, "by both using and ironically abusing general conventions and specific forms of representation, postmodern artworks de-naturalize them" (Hutcheon 8). Thus as a form of parody − of imitating its political context − such a film is "doubly coded" as "it both legitimizes and subverts that which it parodies" (Hutcheon 97). In the context of post-truth politics, this self-reflexivity is therefore an awareness of the powerful spectacle of post-truth which, as Hutcheon argues, does not 'reflect' society so much as it 'grants' meaning and value" to specific political agendas and policies (97). Through a self-reflexive interpretation of this post-truth spectacle, and the parodic highlight thereof in a storyline, the film aims to de-naturalize that which in current American politics has become even more "accustomed" and "commonplace" (Hutcheon 3; Keyes 12; Alterman 3). It is for this reason that Hutcheon, uses Barthe's concept of 'doxa' referring to

dominant repeated accounts which in this case would refer to repeated post-truth political anti-immigrant and anti-minorities discourse presented as being normal or the opinion of the 'silent majority' (3; Barthes 165; Allen 88-89). Hence, the self-reflexivity of film "dedoxifies" the context of its production and reveals it to be a "visible negation of life", that is to say, a negation of the material and evidential intricacies on the ground (Hutcheon 3; Debord 9).

      The Night Of 's self-reflexivity can be found in its parodic appropriation of a post-truth context in a completely different setting and storyline. Through its representation of a storyline in which there is an overall indifference to truth, the series presents a parody of its post-truth surroundings. There is, therefore, a so-called 'defamiliarization'; presenting the audience with familiar themes in an unfamiliar or strange setting as to emphasize perception of the familiar (Jameson 39). This is what Brecht referred to as the *Verfremdungseffekt* or alienation effect (154). As such, there are four stages to the alienation effect as presented by Brecht and Jameson; first, it aims "to make something look strange, to make us look at it with new eyes", and second, it does so by artistic techniques in the narrative. Third, it allows sympathy with the protagonist only to the degree that the audience can identify his/her suffering as part of a wider socio-political context and not only as bound to the protagonist. Fourth, it depicts its characters and narrative as historically and politically contingent and constructed which allows them to be altered (Jameson 39-40; Brecht 152-154; Curran 170,173). *The Night Of* follows these stages as it makes the familiar spectacle of post-truth strange because it sets it in a completely different setting of crime and the judicial system. By doing so and portraying a constructed narrative in which the indifference to truth is the cynosure, the series emphasizes the 'constructedness' of post-truth spectacles, that is to say, it presents the indifference to truth "beyond the realms of the natural" or as an unchangeable spectacle (Koutsourakis 188). It does this primarily by making the spectacle of post-truth strange in its storyline of characters all caught up in a cycle of uncertainty, thus providing a 'fresh' way of seeing post-truth. This is in order to break with the "numbness" and laid-back perception of post-truth due to its everyday prevalence to the point that is has become 'accustomed' or a political habit and thus by making it strange, the series "makes us look at it with new eyes (Jameson 39).

      Most importantly, the series' defamiliarization or 'making strange' takes place through its deployment of a 'non-linear' narrative. This artistic technique essential to postmodern art implies an emphasis on "the depiction of the sheer 'meaninglessness' of random events and

fractured narration", that is, there is a "rejection of structure, order, continuity, and cause-effect relations in favor of disorder, chaos, chance, discontinuity, indeterminacy, and forces of random or aleatory play" (Best and Kellner, *The Postmodern* 131, 136). Throughout the series there are various 'random' shots or acts and interruptions either by showing random scenes of characters thinking or staring alone or flashbacks, such as Naz's flashbacks of his night with Andrea (01:27-02:34), or interrupting scenes of John dealing with his eczema (37:10) ("Subtle Beast"). As such, there is a constant reminder to the viewer that he is watching fiction and a representation. By doing so the series does not "simply reproduce reality" but through its techniques reminds the viewer that he is watching an artistic interpretation of a post-truth climate and highlights the "contradictions" of this climate that presents itself as reality (Rushton 47). The series does this through the portrayal of contradicting ideas, convictions, and beliefs on what happened to Andera and who might have killed her. There is no single truth but multiple 'truths' and possibilities all contingent on how they are represented by the different characters in the series, being either Naz and his attorney, or the prosecuting officer, or even the public convinced that Naz is guilty based on what they see in the media on his background (Price and Zaillian*). The non-linear narrative full of interruptions highlights how the show interprets this post-truth indifference to truth as an accustomed phenomenon, which is especially visible in the scene in which Naz is transported to Rikers Island. While Naz sits anxiously in the transportation car, the scene is interrupted by shots of John in a pharmacy and shots of detective Box driving in his car listening to an opera while there is a constant sound of Naz's heartbeat throughout the whole scene (35:41-38:04) (see fig.4) ("Subtle Beast"). What is therefore visible is how the absence of truth and how merely, as John argues, "speculation" which led to "the rush to judgment against" Naz and sending him to Rikers Island ("The Call of the Wind"), in a post-truth world has become accustomed and natural to the point that there is a 'coldness' and carelessness towards it.

Consequently, the series presents the suffering of its protagonist as the result of a particular socio-political zeitgeist. Rather than presenting a character that requires a direct empathy from the viewer, *The Night Of* portrays a complex suffering character that has good and bad qualities. While Naz is a naïve student, he is also a drug addict when he exits prison, and even if he did not kill Andrea, he did not try to save her upon discovering her body. Along these lines, Naz's qualities are always presented in conjunction with the social and political,

either with the discrimination he faces as a Muslim American, the harsh conditions in Rikers Island, and the overall absence of truth causing his suffering. Therefore, the series does not present an orthodox Aristotelian tragedy but follows Brecht's critique on Aristotelian tragedy as being centered around the protagonist's *hamartia*. What Aristotle meant by his concept of *hamartia*, is a "flaw" stemming from within the tragic hero or protagonist due to his own poor judgment or luck which triggers the ultimate objective of the tragedy being pity and fear among the audience (Poet. 1452b 7-8; Curran 172). Brecht's alienation effect aimed to present a "less sympathetic character", such as Naz, which, however "does allow the audience to sympathize with" the character by presenting the cause of his suffering not primarily in an internal flaw, but in a socio-political factor, that is, the cause is external (Curran 172). Thus, there is an emphasis on "the social dimension of […] suffering" in the series which works as a "the valorization of social forces"–being in this case a spectacle of post-truth − "over characters" (Koutsourakis 5). It is for this reason that the series puts developments in the storyline and in Naz's character in a sequence of causation set against a socio-political context of post-truth. As such, the indifference to truth throughout the story progress, the reliance on stereotypes and stigmas, the indifference to the social truths of Naz as a Muslim American student living in a Pakistani community, leads to the rush of denying Naz's bail and sending him to Rikers Island, and consequently his addiction to drugs, increased disillusionment, as well as the indecisiveness of the jury. Whether Naz killed Andrea or not, and whether his tendency to violence as he narrates that he pushed his classmate down the stairs when he was in fifth grade, his actions are set against a political background of post-truth Islamophobia ("Samson and Delilah").

Naz's character is therefore ultimately portrayed as "representative" of his "social role" in a post-truth context (Koutsourakis 2). The series does not only present a look from the inside of Naz's character but most importantly a "look from the outside" which connects "the personal with the political via a method that does not portray" the murder case and storyline "as a personal tragedy, but as a phenomenon that can be understood" politically (Koutsourakis 5). Naz is thus not merely a tragic protagonist but can be granted the epithet of a 'political tragic' protagonist (Curran 181). This gives the protagonist and the group of people affected by the same spectacle of post-truth politics a specific depth. By showing contradictions of post-truth spectacle, the series sets flat, superficial references to Islam and Muslim minorities against the depth of experiences by Naz's parents and his community. As illustrated in the previous chapter, several

ignorant stereotypical references to Muslims and terrorism pop up throughout the series, from references to 9/11 and the decision to immediately remand Naz because he is a "flight risk" (23:25-23:44) ("The Art of War"), to the media insisting on politicizing the crime; as reporters ask the officer in a news conference on the crime:

> Reporter: Is the suspect a citizen?
> Officer: The records show he was born here, yes.
> Reporter: But he's Muslim. Is that right?
> Officer: We understand he is.
> Reporter: Does he have ties to any foreign organizations?
> Officer: That's under investigation. (27:00-28:02) ("A Dark Crate").

In another instance illustrating this superficiality and ignorance is when a few officers are investigating Naz's taxicab. When detective Box arrives, who is in charge of the investigation, one of the officers shows him a picture of Ali (see fig.5), the Muslim caliph, found in the taxicab:

> Second officer: Check this guy out.
> Box: This would be Ali, the first Imam of Islam.
> Second officer: Yeah? Where's he now?
> Box: Nowhere. He was assassinated in the 7th century. The Shias see him as the rightful heir of Muhammad, the Sunnis don't, and therein lies the... you know?
> Second officer: What were you, Box, in counter-terrorism?
> Box: I like to read.
> Second officer: Yeah, but that shit? (47:03-47:33) ("Subtle Beast").

Among other references is the constant conflation of 'Muslim' with 'Arab' as the Naz in many instances is referred to as being Arab, while there is also a conflation between Arab and South Asian identity (*The Night Of* ; Beydoun 20-21). It is for this reason that Alison, Naz' temporary lawyer, chooses Chandra from her firm who is of Indian descent to take Naz's case because, because according she believes that should be "close enough" to Naz's Pakistani background (36:41-37:07) ("A Dark Crate"). Moreover, this is why John, asks Chandra if would like a drink but tells her: "Oh, forgot, no alcohol", to which she replies: "That's Muslims, I'll drink anything" (18:05-18:10) ("Samson and Delilah"). By doing so the series highlights the superficial post-truth Islamophobic tendency to label an immensely ethnically and culturally diverse religious group as being homogenous while disregarding the deep experiences of the communities on the ground (Beydoun 20-21). As such, the series presents this other side of the coin by giving depth to the Khan family by highlighting the socio-economic difficulties faced by first-generation Pakistani immigrant parents working hard to afford the education of their

children as well as the discrimination they face (see fig.6) ("Ordinary Death"). From being unable to afford a lawyer for their son's case ("A Dark Crate"), to being subjected to multiple instances of racism throughout the series, to being devoted to their own culture and religion, to living in Jackson Heights, a predominantly South Asian immigrant community in Queens (see fig 7) (03:02-04:38) ("The Beach"), the Khan family illustrates this depth of experience. As Naz's case progresses the family as well as their whole community face a racist backlash particularly illustrated in a scene in which Naz's father walks by in his neighborhood to find a racist graffiti on the wall with a Nazi swastika symbol next to it (see fig.8) (06:59-07:18) ("Ordinary Death"). It is through such references as well as the emphasis on scenes illustrating the family's suffering which highlights the contradictions of post-truth Islamophobia; that is to say, the series exposes the 'truths' experienced by these people on the ground concealed by the spectacle of right-wing populist post-truth.

Along these lines, through its self-reflexive storyline and depth, the series defies what Baudrillard saw as depthless postmodern culture (23, "Debord"). On the contrary, the series symptomizes a 'dissimulation' and the creation of new meanings and a fresh look at post-truth politics. This self-reflexive use of post-truth in the series is, therefore, is in Brechtian terms a technique of 'negation'; by making post-truth strange, this defamiliarization is a negation of the negation as the series uncovers the spectacle to be a negation of life (qtd. in Koutsourakis 188; Debord 9). As Best and Kellner argue, "the political function of critical art becomes, negatively, a defamiliarization from the dominant mode of experiencing reality" (*The Postmodern* 277). This non-conformist creativity of art negates the prevalent spectacle of post-truth politics in a way that is reminiscent of Marcuse's 'alienation from alienation' (72). There are therefore two mechanisms of alienation: First, the alienation created by the spectacle of post-truth and the uncertainty, disillusionment, alienation of spectators that it brings with it as well as its negation of evidence, everyday experiences, or statistics. Second, the cultural alienation from- and negation of- the latter through which the "familiarity with the given object world is broken−broken in a second alienation: that from the alienated society" (Marcuse 72). Thus, the series' negation indirectly brings to light the contradictions and inconsistency of post-truth politics through its storyline. What is important to note is that while the series questions right-wing post-truth politics and creates new meanings concerning Islamophobia and social truths of its characters, it does not give resolutions or guidance for action in a classic Brechtian fashion. It

is to this extent that the series can be considered "post-Brechtian" in the sense that, as Koutsourakis argues, "questions are valorized over answers so as to provide an excess of negativity, which intends to make the audience productive" (2). There are no answers given in the series but the viewer is left with multiple questions to be reflected on involving truth, politics, Islamophobia, minorities, and the media. Therefore, there is an evident open-endedness which is also symbolized in the series' open ending in which detective Box has a new suspect in the Andrea case but still, there is no reveal of who killed Andrea, that is there is still no truth ("The Call of the Wind"). Thus, the intention is not to provide clear political answers and resolutions to be exploited by a specific political agenda, but to "confront the audience with questions that can revive conflict" (189).

Conclusion

Creative Resistance and The Fire Next Time

"If nothing is true then all is spectacle. The biggest wallet pays for the most blinding lights"
(Snyder, *On Tyranny* 65).

In his recent book *On Tyranny,* Timothy Snyder writes that "post-truth is pre-fascism (71). He has also argued that is one wants to "rip the heart out of a democracy", this is done through going after facts; that is to say "step one: you lie yourself all the time, step two: you say it's the opponents and journalists who lie, step three: everyone looks around and says: What is truth? There is no truth" ("Timothy"). Despite the heaviness of this statement, it is beyond doubt that our era of intensified post-truth presents a true threat and assault on democratic principles. The American political climate presents a clear example of an unprecedented apathy towards democracy and its ideals resulting in real policies affecting millions of lives within the US as well as internationally (Albright 5; Giroux, *American* 23; Beydoun 174-176). What is needed is, therefore, an opposition that does not only confine itself to the classic investigative politics of journalism and classic political activism but also an opposition coming from one of the most potent arenas of political struggles: culture. Hence, to return to the question guiding this study, visual culture is not simply an entertaining realm or a tool for authoritative accounts, rather, oppositional postmodern culture that finds itself in a discourse of post-truth subverts and criticizes a political climate in which an indifference to truth has paved the way for an apathy towards democratic ideals. Through its populist nationalistic discourse, post-truth does not only make use of a postmodern intensified American zeitgeist of assorted fears, economic and social anxieties, and democratic fatigue, but it further contributes to this postmodern uncertainty through its contradictions, indifference to facts, evidence, and real-time events.

A postmodern political cultural reaction to this discourse provides a break with this spectacle firstly through its creative interpretation of this climate that sets its storyline and narrative in a politically relevant context shedding light on the concerns and anxieties of this context in a way that exhibits a political awareness. Secondly, through its postmodern self-reflexivity that illustrates an oppositional postmodernism that creates "new syntheses" between the modern and postmodern, oppositional postmodern art while being aware of its postmodern

condition of intensified post-truth aims to challenge the very socio-political context of its production. In a manner that illustrates a continuation of modernist strategies such as Brecht's theater, and the Situationist movement, *The Night Of* symptomizes an oppositional postmodern visual culture that 'denaturalizes' an all too familiar post-truth environment and exposes it to be a politically constructed discourse. Rather than jumping on the bandwagon of vast number of television series and films that perpetuate stereotypes, racial slurs, white supremacy, cultural nationalism, and what Kellner refers to as "spectacles of terror" (98), *The Night Of* presents an example of a postmodern struggle against a post-truth assault on religious minorities, people of color, immigrants, the poor and socially disadvantaged, and more specifically a growing explicit Islamophobia that is one of the hallmarks of the 'Trump effect'. *The Night Of* through its *dramatis peronae* and discourse, sets an extremely diverse American Muslim community marginalized on economic, cultural, religious, and racial levels and perpetually under attack and politicization by a post-truth discourse, at the heart of its political commentary. It creates new meanings and takes on a post-truth cacophony in a way that does not necessarily follow a classic political activism but a creative resistance that leaves the audience with intriguing and eye-opening questions.

If anything, else proves the necessity and potency of critical postmodern culture is Donald Glover's (aka Childish Gambino's) "This is America" music video. Two days after the song's release on Youtube, the video received millions of views alongside a significant public discussion on the meaning of the lyrics and music video which contains graphic and explicit political themes (Gajanan). In its commentary on the American 'Black' experience, gun violence, and popular culture through its choreography, similar to *The Night Of*, Gambino's song presents a postmodern self-aware critique of how popular culture and the post-truth 'spectacle' distracts the spectators from real experiences and facts (Gajanan). It is the role of a postmodern cultural politics to reattach the spectator to this overshadowed real experience on the ground ranging from either gun violence, racism, Islamophobia, ineffective policies, and "verifiable reality" (Snyder, *On Tyranny* 66). It is evident that today brings many challenges or 'fires', as Baldwin argued (*The Fire*1), not only within the US but on the global political scene, from growing right-wing populism, intolerance, and indifference towards reality and truth. But cultural politics has to be ready for the challenges that are yet to come and the how the 'fires'

of today will manifold in the near future, in other words, culture is cardinal in meeting "the fire

next time" (Baldwin, *The Fire* 1, 105).

Appendix

Fig.1. Naz's photo on the frontpage of a newspaper; "A Dark Crate"; *The Night Of* ; written by Richard Price and Steven Zaillian; directed by Steven Zaillian; HBO, 2016

Fig.2. Helen Weiss explaining how the truth is 'redacted'; "The Call for the Wind"; *The Night Of* ; written by Richard Price and Steven Zaillian; directed by Steven Zaillian; HBO, 2016.

Fig.3. Naz's transformation from the first episode (left) to the last episode (right) as he sits while consuming drugs in the same spot he sat with Andrea; "The Beach"; "The Call for the Wind"; *The Night Of* ; written by Richard Price and Steven Zaillian; directed by Steven Zaillian; HBO, 2016.

Fig.4. The scene in which Naz is transported to Rikers Island that is interrupted by other shots; "Subtle Beast"; *The Night Of* ; written by Richard Price and Steven Zaillian; directed by Steven Zaillian; HBO, 2016.

Fig. 5. Detective Box finds a picture of Ali in the Khan's taxi; "Subtle Beast"; *The Night Of* ; written by Richard Price and Steven Zaillian; directed by Steven Zaillian; HBO, 2016.

Fig. 6. After their son's arrest and them losing their jobs, the Khan's are forced to sell some of their belongings (including Ms.' Khans wedding ring) and to work other jobs (Naz's father as a deliveryman and his mother as a charwoman) to be able to support their family; "Samson and Delilah"; "Ordinary Death"; *The Night Of* ; written by Richard Price and Steven Zaillian;directed by Steven Zaillian; HBO, 2016.

Fig. 7. Naz's community and family; "The Beach"; *The Night Of* ; written by Richard Price and Steven Zaillian, directed by Steven Zaillian; HBO, 2016.

Fig.8. A swastika symbol in Naz's neighborhood; "Ordinary Death"; *The Night Of*; written by Richard Price and Steven Zaillian, directed by Steven Zaillian; HBO, 2016

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